

**Testimony to the Montana Legislature, House Appropriations Committee
concerning House Bill 221, by Jesse Oldham, The Salvation Army, Great Falls.**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today on behalf of House Bill 221. My name is Jesse Oldham; I reside at 6100 Buckboard Lane, Great Falls, Montana. I am the Emergency & Disaster Services Coordinator for The Salvation Army in Cascade County as well as the Family/Social Services Warehouse Supervisor, responsible for the purchase, procurement, and distribution of food for our food basket program.

In the New Testament of the Bible, we hear Jesus rebuking a disciple over an item of value, telling that disciple, "the poor always you have with you". This is as true today as it was during the time of Christ. From January 1, 2009 until December 31, 2010, (2 years) The Salvation Army in Great Falls has provided 6,155 food baskets to residents of Great Falls & Cascade County.

At The Salvation Army Family Services office in Great Falls we have seen an increase in demand of 17% in 2010 over 2009 (Jan-Jun 2010 saw a 30% increase over the same period in 2009). The Food for All Montana (FAM) program has provided us over 51,000 pounds (nearly 16% of our total distribution and amounting to nearly 1 ½ semi loads) of food from its inception to date. This equates to approximately \$64,100.00 dollars of food that has gone directly to clients since July of 2009. Without the FAM program we would have had to make cuts to our other services or restrict our food basket assistance. In 2009 we provided over 190,000 pounds of food to local families. In 2010 that increased to over 225,000 pounds (equal to nearly 6 semi loads). That was divided up into 3,317 food boxes which went to families requiring food assistance in Great Falls and Cascade County. ¹⁶⁸³

How much food is that really? What does it take to fill 3,317 food boxes? Well I'm going to tell you! It takes 5,285 cans each of corn, green beans, & peas; 17,204 cans of soup; 3,400 jars of peanut butter; 11,919 cans of fruit; 5,285 cans of tuna and 3,807 boxes each of hamburger and tuna helpers. There is more but I

believe you get the idea of the quantities involved that are required to meet the need we are faced with.

Mr. Chairman, members' of this committee, that need is great. We normally allow clients food baskets once every two months, unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise. Prior to the implementation of the FAM program we were contemplating extending the waiting period between food boxes from two months to three months. Should this program fail to be refunded, that option will possibly be returned to the table.

Since November 2, the day the citizens of Montana placed their trust in you to look out for their interests, to represent them here in Helena, we have provided food baskets for 651 families, consisting of 1,604 family members of which 560 are children. This does NOT include those families that received Thanksgiving or Christmas assistance.

We are only able to help those in need through the generous and compassionate donations of those who want to positively affect their world and for those donors, and on behalf of our clients, we are eternally grateful. We utilize food supplied by The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) of the USDA yet this only amounted to 27,176 pounds or 12% of our total food distribution for 2010. With FAM providing 16% that leaves the remaining 72% of our food distribution to be either donated or purchased. You can see what a vacuum the loss of the FAM Program would place in our current struggle to help those in need.

Unfortunately in these harsh economic times, that need can be overwhelming. I read in the Great Falls Tribune on January 11 of this year that even Medicaid may be on the chopping block at some point. Congress tries to fund programs by curtailing the SNAP and WIC program scheduled increases yet the number of families on those rolls continues to increase. I'm reading now that wholesale and retail food prices are on the upswing again. Gasoline is reaching above \$3.00 per gallon and some pundits are predicting that \$5.00 a gallon gasoline is inevitable. Mr. Chairman, members of this committee, these things result in consequences that must be dealt with, usually by those least able to

afford them, those who are only trying to survive from day to day and week to week. These are those people and families that depend on a network of emergency food providers.

On their behalf and in their stead, I urge you to pass House Bill 221. Thank you for your time and attention. I am at your service.